

## AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) ~~Bleached polyacrylic acid crosslinked cellulosic fibers, comprising polyacrylic~~ Polyacrylic acid crosslinked cellulosic fibers ~~subsequently~~ treated with a bleaching agent, wherein the Whiteness Index of the polyacrylic acid crosslinked fibers treated with the bleaching agent increases from a first value determined ~~initially~~ at least one day after treatment ~~of the polyacrylic acid crosslinked fibers~~ with the bleaching agent to a second value determined up to 14 days after treatment with the bleaching agent.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the bleaching agent comprises hydrogen peroxide.

4. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the bleaching agent comprises hydrogen peroxide in combination with sodium hydroxide.

5. (Currently amended) A method for making bleached polyacrylic acid crosslinked fibers, comprising spraying a bleaching agent into an air stream containing polyacrylic acid crosslinked fibers, wherein the Whiteness Index of the polyacrylic acid crosslinked fibers treated with the bleaching agent increases from a first value determined ~~initially~~ at least one day after treatment ~~of the polyacrylic acid crosslinked fibers~~ with the bleaching agent to a second value determined up to 14 days after treatment with the bleaching agent.

6. (Original) The method of Claim 5, wherein the bleaching agent comprises hydrogen peroxide.

7. (Original) The method of Claim 6, wherein hydrogen peroxide is applied to the fibers in an amount from about 0.1 to about 20 pounds per ton fiber.

8. (Original) The method of Claim 6, wherein the bleaching agent comprises hydrogen peroxide in combination with sodium hydroxide.

9. (Original) The method of Claim 8, wherein sodium hydroxide is applied to the fibers in an amount up to about 5 pounds per ton fiber.

10. (Currently amended) An absorbent product, comprising bleached polyacrylic acid crosslinked cellulosic fibers, wherein the bleached polyacrylic acid crosslinked cellulosic fibers comprise polyacrylic acid crosslinked cellulosic fibers subsequently treated with a bleaching agent, wherein the Whiteness Index of the polyacrylic acid crosslinked fibers treated with the bleaching agent increases from a first value determined initially at least one day after treatment of the polyacrylic acid crosslinked fibers with the bleaching agent to a second value determined up to 14 days after treatment with the bleaching agent.

11. (Original) The product of Claim 10, wherein the product is a wipe, tissue, or towel.

12. (Original) The product of Claim 10, wherein the product is an infant diaper, adult incontinence product, or feminine hygiene product.

13. (Previously presented) The fibers of Claim 1 having a Whiteness Index greater than about 75.0.